Final Evaluation Report

Burlington Truancy Prevention Project
Burlington, Vermont

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INTRODUCTION

The Burlington school district has seen increasing student attendance and graduation rates, with reciprocal decreases in the dropout rate. The statistics are remarkable considering the rate of poverty in the district. Ten years ago Burlington was identified as one of several school districts in Vermont with the highest drop out rate. Now it joins Bennington as a district that has had success turning this trend around. Its approach has been distinct, focusing on a consistent attendance policy across all schools in the district. The policy is often supplemented by supportive case management for students and families, to identify and overcome barriers to attending school. A consistently enforced policy would not be possible without collaboration from various community players, such as the court system and the community's family services. The United Way contributes a key leadership role in the truancy prevention effort.

History of Burlington's Truancy Prevention Project: Districts with high drop out rates were identified because of growing concern by state agencies about the connection between dropping out of school and further problems such as crime and incarceration. Communities were then given funds to address the problem. In Burlington, various community players defined the problem as "a community problem" and formed a task force to study the issue. They found that truancy was a significant precursor to dropping out of school and decided to focus on preventing it. Grant monies from the Safe and Healthy Schools Project and the Agency of Human Services provided resources for developing a prevention approach, which focused primarily on policy development to encourage students to attend school on a regular basis.

According to one elementary guidance counselor, the truancy rate at her school was growing and as she said, "We wanted to try to intervene." There was a sense on the part of the faculty and administrators that "if we could lower the truancy rate at the earliest ages, this would set the context for the future." The counselor went on to say that it was extremely important to find out why the children were not regularly attending school since sporadic instruction often leads to lower levels of learning. Those looking at the issue found that often it is because of illness in the family or a lack of understanding. Therefore, the need for case management was recognized as an important second component to the truancy prevention approach.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study has been to examine what interventions worked in Burlington, what were their effects, and which are replicable. The evaluation of the Burlington Truancy Prevention Project centered on two primary components identified by its leadership: School Attendance Policy and Case Management. The overarching evaluation questions that guided the data collection were:

1) How do selected stakeholders (school and program personnel, community partners, students and families) view the process, outcomes, and sustainability of the truancy and dropout prevention programs?

2) What are the essential components of the programs that stakeholders consider most effective?

3) What outcomes have the programs tracked and recorded. How have students performed on these outcomes?

4) How are student outcomes related to measures of their participation and background characteristics?

5) How do students describe their experiences with the programs?

6) What program improvements do stakeholders recommend?

7) What are the recommendations of stakeholders for a community that wants to replicate the positive outcomes of the programs?

Expanding on questions #3 and #4, the quantitative part of the evaluation focused on the outcomes of the Burlington Truancy Prevention Project including: attendance, times tardy, dropout rate, and graduation rate. Specifically, the following research questions were posed to the data provided by the Burlington School District and available on the Vermont Department of Education's website:

1. How did students in the district perform with respect to attendance during the years 2000 through 2006?

2. How did students in the district perform with respect to number of times tardy during the years 2005 through 2006?

3. How did groups of students (school populations) formed by gender compare with respect to the number of days absent by school in 2005 and 2006

4. How did groups of students (school populations), formed by free or reduced priced lunch eligibility, compare with respect to the number of days absent by school in 2005 and 2006

5. How did students in the district perform with respect to the dropout rate from 1999 through 2006?

6. How did students in the district perform with respect to the graduation rate from 2003 through 2006?

7. How does the profile of graduation rates over the past four years compare with state averages, given the respective poverty rates for the state and district?

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data collection: Interviews were conducted with 13 program personnel, school staff, and community partners (See Appendixes A through C for interview questionnaires). School Personnel included school administrators and guidance counselors. Project Personnel entailed attendance social workers, the project's director and its coordinator. Community Partners were invited from collaborating agencies and met as a focus group. In addition to the interviews, two of the researchers observed a truancy meeting for community partners where a youth shared personal experiences and outcomes of the program. Therefore, one youth's perspectives are reflected in this report.

Limitations to the qualitative data: The original evaluation plan included focus group interviews with youth and parents (See Appendixes D and E for interview questionnaires). However, despite persistent attempts by the research team to collaborate with the program staff to arrange focus group interviews with parents and youth, unanticipated difficulties on the part of the program staff prevented these focus groups from coming to fruition. Therefore, a variety of youth and family perspectives are not included in these findings. Perhaps in a future study, it will be possible to pursue this data when the project staff are in the position to help arrange the connections with families and youth. Research staff rely on this collaboration in order to comply with necessary protections of research participants as required by the University's Institutional Review Board.

Quantitative data sources: The quantitative portion of the study relied upon data supplied by the school district and records maintained by the program. These were supplemented by additional data from the Vermont State Department of Education's website. All data were analyzed and reported at the level of the school as individual student records were not available.

Limitations to the quantitative data: Analyses of program outcomes by school were limited by the availability of data for only the years of 2005 and 2006. District level data for graduation and dropouts was available for the years 2003 through 2006 and is reported for question #7. The original design of the evaluation called for the linkage of student outcomes of grades and test scores to the individual variables of absences, tardies, dropout or graduation, gender and eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Since student level data were not available, the questions about program effects on academic performance remain unanswered by the evaluation.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative findings resulting from the interviews and observation include the following themes: **1) Collaboration and Cooperation by Key Community Partners; 2) Truancy Prevention and Intervention: Policy and Case Management; 3) Outcomes Attributed to the Project; 4) Unmet Needs; and 5) Stakeholder Recommendations.** The first two address the primary items that would need to be replicated by another district that wanted to implement this approach.

1) Collaboration and Cooperation by Key Community Partners

Community ownership of the problem: The team of community partners has shown exemplary collaboration in defining and addressing the problem of truancy. They view it as a "community problem" and have historically worked together to study the problem and share responsibility for it. Each community partner takes a role in working to solve the problem collaboratively. Highlighting the effectiveness of the community-wide effort, many people interviewed felt a core factor to its success was "the partnership" and that a "broad spectrum of people have bought in" including social workers, law enforcement, family centers, and the courts. According to one staff member, "the whole system sees it as not a school problem, but a community problem", adding, "it's in the newspaper a lot."

When asked what another school district should consider regarding project replication, staff members emphasized the need for multiple stakeholders owning the problem. One staff member said, "It can't be the school alone." The Burlington Attendance Project lists its own elements for replication in its brochure (See: http://www.bsdvt.org/District/Grants/Truancy/default.htm.).

According to a founding stakeholder, the original study of the problem found two predictors of dropping out of school: 1) truancy, and 2) the absence of a caring adult or mentor in a child's life. The predictor they focused most on was truancy. It was found to be a precursor of dropping out rather than the cause. It was also found to be a symptom of other issues.

According to one community stakeholder, the original truancy prevention planning team hired two social workers from the Baird Center for Children and Families and assigned them to the truancy project. These social workers identified youth who were at risk of dropping out because they were not attending school. The social workers were charged to "do whatever it takes and help us understand what is getting in the way."

The social workers found "as many issues as kids." The children were living in challenging conditions involving mental health concerns, domestic violence, poverty, and homelessness. It became apparent that one program would not meet all these needs. In other cases, systems were not communicating with each other and that prevented children from attending school. For example, a handful of systems were working with one family. SRS would bring some of the siblings to school but the school would not allow one of the children to attend if tardy.

According to one community stakeholder, as it became apparent that the conditions in which these children lived were located outside of school, defining the issue as a community problem made sense. This community ownership of the problem held all systems accountable and left an opening for schools to come to the planning table without feeling the entire burden on them. The intent of this truancy planning team was to look at the systems working with families and create changes that would help the truancy prevention effort be sustainable over time. This stakeholder commented, "It took a while for key partners to play together well. Joint ownership and accountability helped keep it together." Seeing the drop out rates decline reinforced commitment to the effort. Other successes toward sustainability helped too: The Burlington schools took on funding for the social worker positions and the courts added the truancy docket.

One community player described the "passion and commitment among all the systems": "This is the first time we had all the key agencies and players represented – people who had the power to insist that their systems do things differently." Another stakeholder discussed the need for a united front among the agencies: "When one agency falters, the whole thing falters." In other words, there is still some struggle with different views on truancy and some people lacking an understanding of the underlying issues involved. Speaking with judges and orienting new judges has been a core effort to strengthen the court aspect of the project. When judges take truancy seriously, it strengthens the whole effort. At one point there was discussion about eliminating the truancy docket and "a few judges stood up and said this is the most important work we do."

Among the community stakeholder team, leadership that will "do whatever it takes" is seen as important to the success of the truancy prevention effort. This means people who will make calls and have the confidence to find a way through system challenges to find solutions. As one person said, "Without that level of support, direct service providers can't do their job effectively." One area that needed troubleshooting was the tendency for families to move to other districts when pressured to send their child to school. The almost countywide adoption of the attendance policy that is underway is beginning to create more consistency among schools.

Key community partners: Various partners form the truancy prevention team. The United Way provides team leadership as well as information on best practices. One school staff person commented on this successful strategy of having "a non-school agency without a stake in one thing or another – a neutral party – in the facilitator role." This leadership is "really good at getting people to the table." This leads to positive outcomes. The staff member said, "The collaborative nature of the program makes it work – all the stakeholders at the table looking at their part."

The schools follow the procedures outlined in the truancy policy. Importantly, the key administrators across all of the Burlington schools consistently utilize the policy. The guidance staff in each school monitor absences, send weekly reports to the program administrator, and organize and participate in meetings for families when youth have been absent for 15 days. This can involve having translators present for families who do not speak English. When problems persist, the guidance staff write affidavits, and share the responsibility, with school principals, for attending court hearings. In addition to providing services to families, the Baird Center for Children and Families oversees the "attendance social workers" who provide case management for families with serious truancy issues.

The court, with its truancy docket, judges and state's attorneys, stands ready to enforce the attendance policy at the community level. The truancy docket is part of the juvenile section of family court. The court system and the judges have been extremely helpful in maintaining a consistent message regarding truancy and several of the judges have been enormously helpful in making certain that the students and families are aware of the consequences of truancy.

The Truancy Prevention Project has a coordinator who handles data collection, recordkeeping and statistical reporting in addition to general coordination and follow up. For example, she collects weekly absence summaries and reminds those submitting them as needed. The coordinator keeps parents informed, writing and sending letters to parents at five and ten days of

absence, and preparing affidavits for most schools. In her ongoing day to day coordination, she keeps in mind those students who use English as a second language and emphasizes a "friendly" approach to policy implementation.

The project director's focus is on district-wide consistency. She coordinates internal truancy team meetings and co-facilitates, with the United Way, the countywide Truancy Task Force. The director is also available to the school and coordinator to troubleshoot if there is a problem with project implementation.

At a truancy meeting, we witnessed the presence of various community players in addition to the project staff. These included representatives of United Way, Baird Center for Children and Families, Department of Children and Families, Vermont Educational Surrogate Parent Program, and assistance to Vermont's homeless population. Also present were school resource officers, police, court judges and the State's Attorney. All partners appear to work in tandem to implement a consistent policy for all students.

2) Truancy Prevention and Intervention: **Policy and Case Management**

The Burlington School System's approach to truancy prevention involves a consistent attendance policy, with case management support as needed. The policy involves a gradation of steps, starting with letters to parents at five and ten days of absence. At 15 days of absence, parents and youth are invited to a meeting designed to identify barriers to attendance and find solutions. When students are absent between 20 and 30 days, court affidavits are filed with the state's attorney's office and cases go to the truancy docket. The role of the court is to provide compassionate yet firm consequences. Attendance Social Workers provide case management and supportive counseling to youth and families, facilitating good communication between home and school, and helping families access needed resources. In addition to linking students with teachers and a school team, their services extend beyond school bounds to home and community visits. Complete information on the policy can be found at the project's website: http://www.bsdvt.org/District/Grants/Truancy/default.htm.

How is truancy defined? The policy defines truancy as any absence, excused or unexcused: "All absences are equal (i.e. no excused absences, illness are counted)…. Parents and guardians who document their student's illnesses are not taken to court." This is based on a stated philosophy that "Absences from school for any reason, such as illness, vacation, religious holidays, family deaths, etc., affect a student's ability to learn and succeed." School personnel are not placed in the position of having to make a judgment about whether an absence is valid or not. Hence, some cases sent to court reveal health issues that the school did not know about. However, for the most part, health issues are not sent to court, since illness is an allowable excuse under state law. Pediatricians are being asked to specify when a child can return to school after an illness. Residential placements are considered for students with mental health concerns that interfere with attending school.

Views on the attendance policy: Everyone interviewed described the attendance policy as fair, straightforward, and consistent. For example, a staff member said it was a "clean process with no interpretation. You are either 5 days absent or not." Another school staff liked "the consistency,

the fairness of how all are treated the same despite socioeconomic status and reason for absence." An attendance social worker appreciated that the policy does not discriminate based on age, gender, and socioeconomic status. However, there is also ability for individual schools to use discretion and be flexible in the case of a death in the family or extended illness. One school staff member described the attendance policy as a "pretty clear system that is very smooth. The clarity makes it easy for me to facilitate. It is clear to parents."

What happens at the 15 day meeting? A 15 day meeting is a team approach and involves parents, students, teachers, guidance staff, often social workers, and a translator when needed. For some students and families, it might be a way to explain the policy more clearly, and for others it will lead to identifying needed supports. Sometimes this involves medical assistance, help with homework, or other kinds of support. One guidance counselor described the 15 day meetings as "nonconfrontational…gets everyone to the table to talk about what's at the bottom of attendance difficulties. Things come to light you don't know about." For example, an illness or death in a family can impact relationships so that a child loses motivation to attend school. According to this school staff person, the 15 day meetings "are very important" in terms of planning. The attendance social workers can get involved to meet some needs. They sometimes anticipate these needs before a 15 day meeting has to occur. Various supports are then accessed. For example, specific documentation might be requested from a doctor, to better understand an illness and how it might impact school attendance.

The guidance counselor commented, "We have a huge number of supports here to pull on….Our support services have increased also" to include both "academic and emotional" assistance. Academic supports might involve arranging for an extra study hall or help with homework. Emotional supports include an in-house clinician from the Baird Center to provide in-school therapy for children. According to this counselor, the before and after school program has grown in the last five to eight years and its offerings keep kids connected to school and invested. The attendance social worker positions provide necessary assistance to youth and their families.

One attendance social worker appreciated the step by step structure of accountability involved in the policy, describing them as "beginning, intermediate, and most accountable steps" and "not all at once." Implementation starts in elementary school, holding students and families accountable. One staff member emphasized the importance of prevention at the elementary school level. This timing can provide opportunities for intervention before a home situation becomes unsafe for a child. Coordination between elementary and middle school is also necessary and at least one person felt it could be strengthened.

A truancy docket at family court: The courts have been very responsive to the truancy policy and have contributed greatly to the decrease in truancy. They face significant challenges, such as situations where children were out of school for forty to sixty days. In these cases, the courts tailored specific consequences for the families whose children were consistently not in school. A court representative explained that consequences are generally case specific. There may be an order to send the child to school or there may be a set of mandatory activities such as attending homework club or counseling. In some cases the court will request further documentation regarding medical issues. In certain circumstances, the court will place a child in DCF custody when a parent cannot get a child to school. A judge once had a parent "walk the child to each

class for a week. It worked." Opinions varied on the effectiveness of court in preventing truancy. According to one guidance counselor, court can be a deterrent to truancy. However, a social worker said, "most kids perceive not much of a consequence" from court.

Case management: Those interviewed emphasized the importance of case management in addition to the truancy prevention policy. In the words of one social worker, "*If there was the court and not the support, it wouldn't work. Court is seen by families as punitive…It needs both pieces. Even letters upset parents.*" Though schools have guidance counselors, their role is to focus on the development needs of children in a school setting and they are available to all the children in a school, which can be 400 students. In contrast, social workers handle approximately 15 to 20 cases at a time. They are in a unique position to handle cases where truancy is chronic. Their work crosses from school into home and community, offering flexibility to work with families with more needs. One social worker explained, "Some families are experiencing significant issues in the home. They are used to systems with consequences and punishment. The 15 day meeting to talk about what we can do to help is better. Attendance improves with social worker involvement coupled with court action."

Case management allows greater attention to issues of diversity, immigrant/refugee priorities and concerns, risk factors, and availability and accessibility of services. Discussing the need for social worker support in addition to the attendance policy, one staff member said, "The letter is not enough due to literacy issues and kids taking out the mail that comes." The letters go to people with "different cultures and different languages." Follow up is needed such as phone contact or a visit home if there is no phone.

The attendance social workers provide case management and supportive counseling, helping to meet special needs. They facilitate good communication between home and school, and often meet with families and youth on the phone, in the family homes, or at community locations. The attendance social workers develop positive relationships with the youth and their parents, sometimes also grandparents, which results in them feeling safe enough to discuss the barriers to attending school. According to one social worker, "My role allows parents one person to call." The social workers problem solve with families to find out what keeps them from going to school. They help families access needed services and resources such as transportation, medical assistance, food, finances, and gifts through holiday giving programs. With limited budgets, they often use their own cars to assist with transportation issues as needed, for example, to doctor's appointments. According to one social worker, most or all of the caseload have limited resources, are Medicaid eligible, and have experienced generational poverty.

In school, the attendance social worker links students with teachers and the overall school team and is a resource to guidance counselors and school. The social worker helps problem solve difficulties in attending school, addresses challenges the student may face with peers, and helps with therapeutic arrangements. One social worker discussed the effectiveness of a supportive school administration that is clear about roles and that allows the social worker flexibility for addressing needs. This includes a guidance team that communicates well. Another contrast between the roles of the counselors and social workers is that guidance counselors file affidavits and go to court whereas the social workers do not attend court according to a Baird Center

policy. Some schools have general social workers who supervise the attendance social workers and cover their caseload when they are unavailable.

As a preventive effort, attendance social workers check attendance lists and ask questions about students with frequent absences. When a 15 day meeting is scheduled, the attendance social worker is introduced as a resource. Sometimes the guidance counselor offers one-on-one assistance and offers that the social worker will contact the student. Sometimes the students are already on the social worker's caseload.

The social workers help other school staff gain awareness and understanding of what prevents young people from getting to school. When staff might assume that 'kids just don't like school', the social workers are able to impart the challenges that families face and how they support each other to make it though. For example, a youth may provide child care so mother can do the grocery shopping. The family may not have a vehicle or public transportation. They may be suffering with mental health issues as well.

As one respondent explained, "This understanding by staff can make a difference in how a child or parent "moves from feeling completely disconnected to having a team" of social workers, administrators, and staff who show support, caring and who notice when they are there or not. It makes a difference when the first staff person they see in school greets them with a "so glad you are here." Through building a strong relationship with an adult (attendance social worker) who sees students at home, in school and in the community, a student gets a sense that they are valued no matter where they are and what adverse circumstances they are experiencing.

While the social worker jobs are challenging, they also come with rewards and opportunities. One social worker said, "Once over the hump of how to feel more comfortable with people without similar middle class values, you see people behind that façade – intelligent, creative, warm, caring, loving." This social worker appreciated "being allowed and welcomed into their homes. People say, please come into my home. You sit with people through challenges – loss of a family member, domestic violence. You can't take their problems away, but you can listen."

Another social worker discussed the "amazing opportunity to change how a child and family feel about school. I've seen it happen many times." This includes the opportunity to make education unique for the child through community internships, modified days, and addressing other issues. Connecting families with other resources they may not have known about can change their view of school. They come to see the social worker as a person who "bridges the gap" and they feel more connected.

One staff member described the unique aspects of the social worker's approach to truancy. Different than a law enforcement approach, the social worker can develop the kind of relationship that makes the student want to come to school. The student senses a "trusting adult aware of things going on in the child's life." With the ability to move beyond school boundaries, the child can see an adult at school and at home. "Crossing the environments in a positive way is key." The attendance social worker lets young people know "there's a trusting adult wanting to know where they are and interact with them and see them in school."

Additional school supports: The school offers other programs and services that supplement the attendance project. These were not identified as the primary focus of the attendance project nor were they a focus of the evaluation. However, they came up in the interviews as supplemental to the success of the truancy prevention project. These additional supports include programs and services such as free after school care, school-based health centers and dental services, alternative programs, mental health placements, and a flexible $2000 give to the high school from United Way for whatever is needed to keep a child in school.

Program staff described these other supports that have been added to help young people stay in school. For example, free after school care for grades K – 12 is offered and youth need to attend school to be eligible. A couple of elementary schools have added school-based health centers that offer physical and mental health care on site during school. A local community health center is providing a dental home for students, paid for by Medicaid. They also treat asthma. A few alternative programs in the middle and high schools offer a place for youth with different learning styles and needs. Reading specialists have been available during the school day as well.

One community leader said that attendance in the Horizons alternative program has been almost directly tied to a decrease in drop out rate. One social worker thought an option for middle school youth to attend the Technical Center could be helpful in addition to more flexible options to educate children in different ways starting in elementary school. The social worker explained that when children have experienced domestic violence and trauma, it is hard for them to sit still in class. Poor school performance starts young. In addition, opportunities that an outreach coordinator might provide could help a few young people access experiences outside of school, such as an apprenticeship with a local restaurant chef.

The United Way gives $2000 to the high school "to use in any way to keep kids in school." The money is used for basic needs such as food, electricity and rent. In one case involving death of a parent and depression of the other parent, it prevented the child from being taken into state custody. It allows the school to keep food in the closet for "kids who need it and who wouldn't go to the food shelf."

3) Outcomes Attributed to the Project

The results reported in the interviews reflect change on a variety of levels. Many spoke of cultural change within the school and larger community. They also said parents and students are more aware of expectations. Teachers and guidance staff are able to be more vigilant about attendance with an enforced policy in place. According to the staff, statistics confirm what they have noticed: the number of 15 day letters and court affidavits has decreased. They see students attending school regularly, feeling more involved and invested, and earning better grades. The school has also noticed the improvement and has begun financially supporting a few social worker positions and a coordinator position for the program.

School and community c*ultural change*: Program staff emphasized the importance of cultural change in the school and community to make this approach effective. In other words, "people know kids are supposed to be in school." Cultural change did not come easily, and some schools were more reluctant to implement the policy. People were "initially surprised when the letters

first started." However, now there is a general sentiment that "attendance is important." Parents are thinking twice about taking their children out of school unless it is absolutely necessary. Children are also more aware. Acknowledging that the first couple of years were hard, one staff person added, "No one could think about not doing this now." She continued, "It saves work later. After the 15 day meetings, you don't see kids again." One guidance counselor said, "the number of students who reach 15 days has decreased. We're doing a lot less than we used to." She added that "personally, less cases are going to court." In the first two years of the project, she said she would file up to five affidavits a year. Now it only amounts to one or two. Another guidance counselor echoed that for some students, patterns of attendance have improved after the 15 day meeting or the court hearing.

A school staff member said, "I think the whole thing is embedded in our school culture. It's a routine part of what we do." Another school staff added, "Parents have a good idea of what is expected. There is no longer the attitude that you can just stay home. The letters reinforce that school is important and they need to be here - holding students and families accountable and making them think." A guidance counselor said, "It keeps all of us on track…If a pattern is developing, we are able to detect it early on." An attendance social worker said, "It lets people know you gotta be in school. There are policies in place to hold people accountable." According to one school staff member, "It's also been helpful for teachers to know there's a system in place to be a deterrent for truancy."

Improved student attendance and performance*:* According to program staff, some students benefited from 15 day meetings at the middle school level and decreased their absences in high school. Approximately 20 youth have received a "Golden Gavel Award" from the court. This award is given to youth as a way of reinforcing their improved attendance and performance in school. The improvement can be remarkable, with a student discharged with straight A's. Dramatic improvement was seen in youth who began with an absentee record of 60 – 90 days and eventually made honor roll.

One guidance counselor noted students attending regularly, getting better grades, showing a higher level of comfort in the building, and feeling less anxious, more invested and happier. She said you "see that in the child's general emotional state. When they are not coming to school, they are always in a state of discomfort." One attendance social worker has noticed reduced rates of truancy, increased school involvement, and an attitude that school is important. Another school counselor noted that the school experienced "better academic outcomes," especially in literacy where reading specialists were available throughout each day. Parents were grateful for the extra help and were proud of what their children were learning.

One student shared his story with a spectrum of stakeholders at the annual truancy meeting for community partners. In 9th grade, he was not going to school and was taking drugs. In his words, "life was falling down." He lived with his mother and had never known his father. He said his mother had "tried everything" to get him to go to school. He spoke to the group: "I wanted to turn 16 and drop out." Through the truancy prevention policy, he was sent to court, where he said the judge was "firm and nice." As a result, he went to drug rehabilitation for two years and attended counseling with his mother. The young man continued, "Now, I want to have a future, even though I still don't like school. I want to have enough money. I know my future is more

important now." He added, "I have a purpose now. I want to live life. Now, I want to go to school and college."

The student, now a 12th grader, said, "I'm so glad this happened - glad I could turn things around and everyone helped me." When asked what made him want to come to school, he described two judges that influenced his thinking when he went to court. One "judge was interested in me….He wanted to help me." The judge asked the student about his interests: "What do you like doing? Do you have a girlfriend?" The other judge firmly made the student aware of the threat of DCF custody. He asked the student, "Do you like your friends? You might not have them anymore. Do you like where you live? You might not live there anymore." The student said, "It freaked me out." These are examples of a combination of compassion and firmness by court judges handling truancy cases. These interactions seem to be important to the success of court intervention.

One administrator reported that "students are coming to school and they do better academically." It became increasingly clear, according to this administrator that the policy was effective and there was "visible improvement." Another administrator noted that even when students drop out "most come back, transfer to another school, or go to Job Corp."

A state's attorney spoke about other success stories. One girl wrote "Thanks for saving my life." The attorney also discussed "finding a kid living under a bridge in January." The handling of cases by the court is seen as critical to the success of the truancy prevention effort. According to one judge, dismissing cases undermines the credibility of the school and the policy among the young people. He wants youth to get the message that the court takes truancy seriously: "We're gonna follow you until you're in school. If you're missing that much school, something's wrong." Truancy is seen as a "red flag", a "symptom of strong dysfunctionality at home." One interviewee said that out of 1300 students, 49 (3.8%) were sent to court in the 2005 – 2006 school year.

Measurable statistics: Staff commented on how data and outcomes were clear and measurable. Decreased rates of truancy and drop out won the project national recognition. The result, as reported by the Project Director, is a decrease in the drop out rate from 10.8% in 1997, to 3.3% in the 2005- 2006 year. She commented, "The data is compelling and has brought investment from the schools."

Some school funding: The school took over funding of some social worker positions and an administrative staff position. Originally, two social worker positions were funded by a grant, but now each school funds them with school budgets. One staff member related this to schools embracing a health center model.

Prevention: The respondents perceive that prevention is working. They point to markers that support this perception. The number of 15 day letters and court cases have decreased. According to the website, after six years of implementation, the number of students who missed five or more days of school (for any reason including illness) dropped by more than 25% or 440 students. One attendance social worker said truancy has improved because the intervention starts early. It is an effective structure for most people and acts as a deterrent. It helps people realize "I can't just take people out of school whenever I want."

The community partners were proud of the outcomes of the program. They indicated that more and more youth are wanting to avoid getting a ten day letter or a 15 day meeting. Another outcome they immediately mentioned was that a high school social worker employed by the school district "knows the names and situations of every child who dropped out. There's a relationship – they're not anonymous. He stays in touch and offers the GED. Basic needs money makes a difference." Another positive outcome they mentioned was that the middle school principles highly value the attendance social workers.

One community partner said, "Success has fed on itself….Watching the drop makes you feel good. Something's happening and working right." Another stakeholder added, "What we asked for is happening in court. Each player (system) is doing their part." Echoing this sentiment, another community leader said, "This kind of collaboration doesn't happen by accident." Others praised the leadership from the United Way, pointing our her consistency, neutrality and facilitation skills. Regarding leadership, one said, "You need to have somebody with the capacity to take that on. It can't be rotating." In addition, the policy was seen as neutral – " a policy about everybody, across all SES levels. It takes the subjectivity out of it. But schools still recognize when not to push it."

4) Unmet Needs

Despite the gains from the current truancy prevention project, some youth still do not attend school. These involve situations where families have complex issues that make school a low priority, and where families refuse services or are unresponsive to court sanctions. Staff explained that sometimes communication with families can be difficult if the family has no phone or if letters are insufficient due to "literacy issues, culture, language, or kids removing mail."

All who were interviewed referred to a group of youth (many referred to it as 1% of the truant population) that seemed to not respond to the intervention. Community partners as well as school and program staff struggled with this reality. For most young people, the project allows families to talk about challenges and address needs. However, even the court system seems to be unable to have an impact on a small population of students.

One staff member reiterated that "truancy is a symptom, not the cause." She listed barriers to school attendance that she called "so depressing," such as homelessness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, and "no history of educational success." This person discussed the challenges of "trying to engage the families in a school system that they haven't been engaged in for years. Usually truancy is an issue since kindergarten. Once kids come to school there are behavioral challenges and people advocate for special ed testing." The social worker continued, "A lot of families and children have mental health issues – anxiety, depression. Many teachers try to understand." The framework to understanding poverty has been helpful to some who work with the more difficult cases.

A school staff person detailed the complex issues among families that make progress difficult. Sometimes, this can include family patterns such as a long history of poor school attendance on the part of siblings and parents who never felt comfortable in an educational setting. Or perhaps

it includes a history of substance abuse by parents and/or by kids. In addition, some families do not have the resources to get adequate treatment for medical issues. Cycles of poverty can leave families uncomfortable navigating the system of supports. In some cases, parents are unavailable to take care of a child's medical issues due to their own drug abuse issues and a general lack of consistency in caring for children. This staff member observed that most families sent to court for truancy were often single parents with a lower socioeconomic status.

Referring to a few cases, a guidance counselor said that the project "hasn't made an impact…when the whole family system is struggling." These are "very complicated" situations. The issues are indeed complex, according to another social worker. Many of the youth are used to missing 30 to 40 days of school. Changing this habit is a challenge. Getting parents and families on board can be difficult where there are extensive mental health issues for students and their families. Sometimes parenting capacity is suppressed and students take on that role. There is a lot of need and many of the families are involved with the Department of Children and Families. They often need more than one-on-one support where poverty and homelessness are issues. Some children "need a roof over their head."

One social worker mentioned a case of an elementary school student who missed more than 40 days of school for medical issues. Despite interventions of the social worker and the court, as well as the school's efforts at being flexible, the student is "still not showing up for school." The social worker explained that although court works well for most students, there is a small percentage for which court seems limited in terms of "how far it can reach into a family culture." In these cases of chronic illnesses and mental health issues, none of the policy's steps improve it. Instead they "alienate the family and make them feel no support from anyone." Even those families who may receive intensive family based services might like the support but show minimal change. Helpers get to the point of saying, "We don't know what else to do with this family."

One school staff person said, "By the time a case gets to court we've exhausted what we have to offer or a family has refused services we've suggested. Even the judge can't order that. A family has to be willing to participate. It has to be voluntary." She added, "For those cases where court doesn't work, the judges need to have extra things up their sleeve." Even though for a number of cases, the act of being in court intimidates a family, there is another group of families who are used to being in court and it has no impact. The staff person speculated, "Either they don't sense it as a threat or the issues are so intense that unless a program is in place, court is not going to impact change, for example, in the case of serious mental health issues."

The state's attorney shared concern about mental health issues that are going unaddressed. More and more youth on the truancy docket (up to 40%) have symptoms, such as severe depression and cutting. "The norm is the kid with mental health issues. We have no where to turn. A psychiatric evaluation is $1000 and no one has the money for it." The fact that the social workers cannot attend court due to agency policy is hard for those working with the truancy docket. It is helpful when affidavits are more detailed so the court has more facts to consider in their decisions. The court is looking to improve the ability for families to follow through with court orders. Some initial thoughts include a merit system, and hiring a social worker to work with the court system and to help the families navigate services.

The community partners discussed this 1% that is not reached through the project. One said, "Family conditions are <u>so</u> <u>bad</u> we just have no idea." The group struggled with this issue. "We have to get these children out of the home but even if we could where would we go? Will it make any difference?" However, another member of the group pointed out that "isolating is not the answer" indicating a desire to keep parents and children intact but hold them both accountable. Early intervention and prevention at child care and pre-school settings seems promising. DCF is seen as "so overworked and underfunded."

Interventions need follow up and change often happens gradually. After years of truancy, it takes time to change the pattern. According to one school staff person, some students make strides in lower grades but then fall into the old truant patterns in high school. Social workers are needed to follow up on challenges and to work closely with the student's team.

5) Stakeholder Recommendations

The stakeholders we interviewed had several recommendations for further addressing truancy prevention. Some of these are already in process, such as a policy about tardiness. (According to the program coordinator, "tardies" are noted on the letters to parents, and highlighted if they amount to over 15. Tardiness is considered disruptive.)

Other recommendations include a commitment by city, state, and federal policy-makers to address issues that impact on truancy, such as housing, homelessness, and mental health. (For example, one stakeholder suggested better opportunities for housing and shorter waiting lists for services to help more students improve attendance.) In addition, funding is needed to increase and stabilize the staff and program positions responsible for program implementation. Others suggested extending the policy beyond Burlington for greater consistency across school districts. One person would like to see simplified bureaucratic procedures between organizations to enhance time for service delivery.

One of the most frequent suggestions from respondents was to stabilize funding for current positions such as the project coordinator and the existing attendance social workers and to secure funding for additional positions including social workers and school resources officers. The program staff would like to see positions added to the local budget for the school district. They would also like to continue the expanded roles of guidance counselors. Some also wanted to see more school resources officer (SRO) positions to work with social workers as needed. When there is a history of violence and domestic abuse issues, as well as drug and alcohol abuse, home visits can pose safety concerns. In this case, an attendance social worker might partner with a truancy officer or an SRO. In addition, the need for a caseworker and social worker to manage post court issues was discussed. Another suggested position was a parent involvement coordinator who could help educate parents on practical skills such as "helping kids go to sleep on time," for example, when there is no bed for the child, and the child might be in a position of needing to sleep on the sofa by a loud television.

Coordinator Position: At the time of the interviews, the project coordinator's part time position had been funded by the local school budget for the first time in seven years. Stakeholders were pleased with this and emphasized that the process of truancy prevention takes time and needs

support. One school staff member said, "You need support personnel to make it work, someone coordinating letters like the coordinator, and support pieces like the social workers." Another school staff member identified the "need to be realistic about the time it demands…to generate all those letters personally would be tough." Referring next to the 15 day meetings, she added that it's a "great process" that takes a lot of time for preparation and follow up, and decision makers "need to be realistic."

Attendance social worker positions: Regarding the future and sustainability of the truancy prevention project, many felt the policy would likely remain in place since much of it is managed by the school staff. However, maintaining social worker positions is not a guarantee. The elementary schools had to relinquish their positions because of a lack of funding. The school board was also considering cutting some general social worker positions. Some mentioned that two general social worker positions had already been cut. Unfortunately, the families served by social workers are unlikely to attend a school board meeting. Their issues are personal and private. People who tend to advocate for the positions are the staff themselves.

Those we interviewed mentioned two attendance social worker positions, one at each middle school. These positions have at times had responsibilities in an elementary school as well. There is one attendance and one general social worker at Hunt Middle School. According to one staff person, it takes 15 to 20 students with absences for the school to have resources for the positions dedicated to attendance. One staff member said that one attendance social worker in a school is not enough: "That piece makes the biggest difference. Ninety percent of the caseload is not in school. It includes picking up kids who aren't there."

Stakeholders advocated for a larger budget to sustain the truancy prevention project. They were pleased that the grant opened up the opportunity to try this approach, which has proven its importance to the district. They believe this has resulted in the middle schools keeping the two attendance social workers. Keeping these positions gives the school more information for decision making about whether to take a child to court or not.

One staff member mentioned school administrations who have worked hard to keep their attendance social workers. "The school recognizes a major impact, but the budget is so hard." One disappointment expressed from a community leader was the inability to retain people in the attendance social worker positions. The turnover results in a loss of continuity and historical perspective. Another community partner emphasized the need for adequate funding to recruit the skill level needed to work with complex family issues.

Work toward countywide and statewide consistency in school attendance policies:
Several respondents said they observed a phenomenon where families move out of the school district to avoid the policy. They would like to see a consistent policy between districts. According to several respondents, a proposal for a countywide attendance policy for Chittenden County is in process. Currently there are several schools outside of Burlington who have adopted Burlington's school policy on truancy. For example, the project director reported that five out of nine school districts have adopted the Burlington project's approach, including how they define truancy. The Superintendent was enthusiastic about the truancy prevention policy and is

interested in collaborating with other school districts in Chittenden County in order to track students who leave Burlington and enroll in other schools in the region.

Other suggestions: Another project staff member raised the fact that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has limited resources to follow up on the increased cases generated through the Burlington Truancy Project. They need more staff and resources in order to follow up on issues of child welfare related to attendance issues. A strong partnership with DCF is seen as important.

One school staff suggested working with physicians to be explicit with parents about when the child can come back to school. For some children who do not want to go to school, "it is hard for the parent to say to the child, it's time to go back to school. It helps the parent and the school that this is what the doctor is saying." Lastly, one social worker discussed making access to tutoring more fair and equitable. For example, an immigrant family may take their children out of school in order to visit family when flights are affordable, but not have additional resources to hire a tutor.

To address the unmet need mentioned in the previous section, one community leader wants to continue to brainstorm consequences and sanctions with the Truancy Task Force. She emphasized that these should be creative. They should also acknowledge the fact that some families have an inherent distrust for schools that has lasted for generations. How can trust be rebuilt while continuing to encourage attendance? The community stakeholders also discussed the need for more attention to relationships with students: "We did the systems change, we could do more on the 'one on one' end." A social worker appreciated the "inclusionary" model of the alternative program, which says, "We're not going to kick you out" and involves caring adults. Referring back to the two predictors of dropping out and how programs statewide have handled prevention efforts, the United Way leader said, "We focus more on the attendance part. [Bennington] focused more on the caring adult."

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Note: In reading the following charts, school outcomes in 2005 and 2006 are indicated at the bottom of each chart and noted as "CH05" and "CH06" for Champlain School, 2005 and 2006, etc.

1. How did students in the district perform with respect to attendance during the years 2000 through 2006?

The charts below indicate that, in general, there is a decrease in the number of students in each category who are absent from 2005 to 2006. The greatest gains seem to be evident in Flynn Elementary and Edmunds Elementary. Reductions at Barnes are probably not significant, but Wheeler, with a similar proportion of free or reduced lunch students to Barnes, does show a significant drop in the number of days absent. Most interesting from these charts is that the threshold of 21+ days, which often signals the probability of dropping out between the 7th and 9th grade, disappears at both Edmunds Middle and Hunt Middle School between 2005 and 2006. *These gains should not be underestimated.*
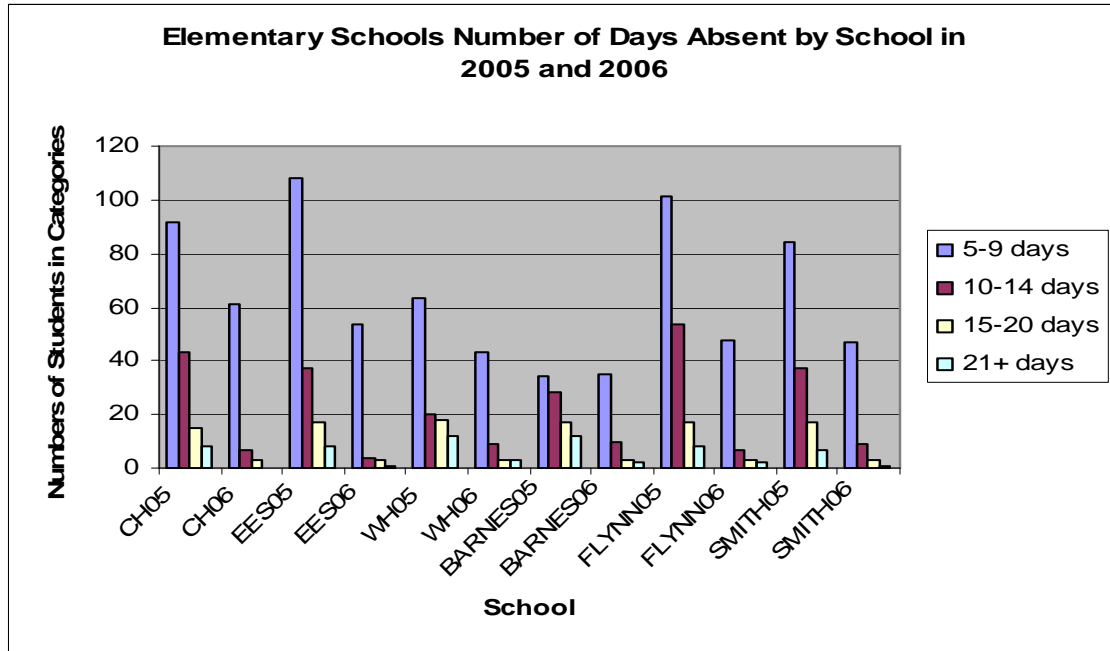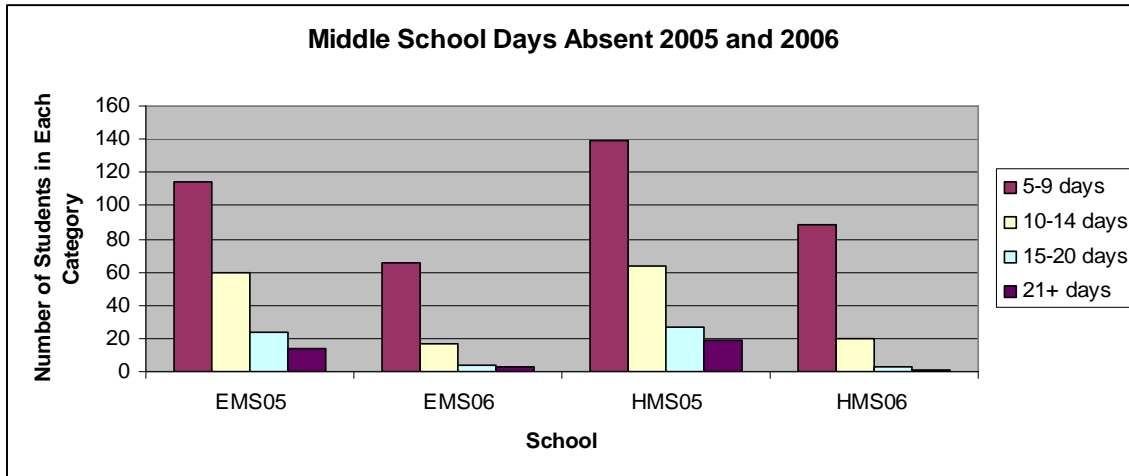
Chart 1

Elementary Schools Number of Days Absent by School in 2005 and 2006

Number of students in categories by school (CH05, CH06, EES05, EES06, WH05, WH06, BARNES05, BARNES06, FLYNN05, FLYNN06, SMITH05, SMITH06) for categories 5-9 days, 10-14 days, 15-20 days, 21+ days.

Chart 2

Middle School Days Absent 2005 and 2006

Number of students in each category by school (EMS05, EMS06, HMS05, HMS06) for categories 5-9 days, 10-14 days, 15-20 days, 21+ days.
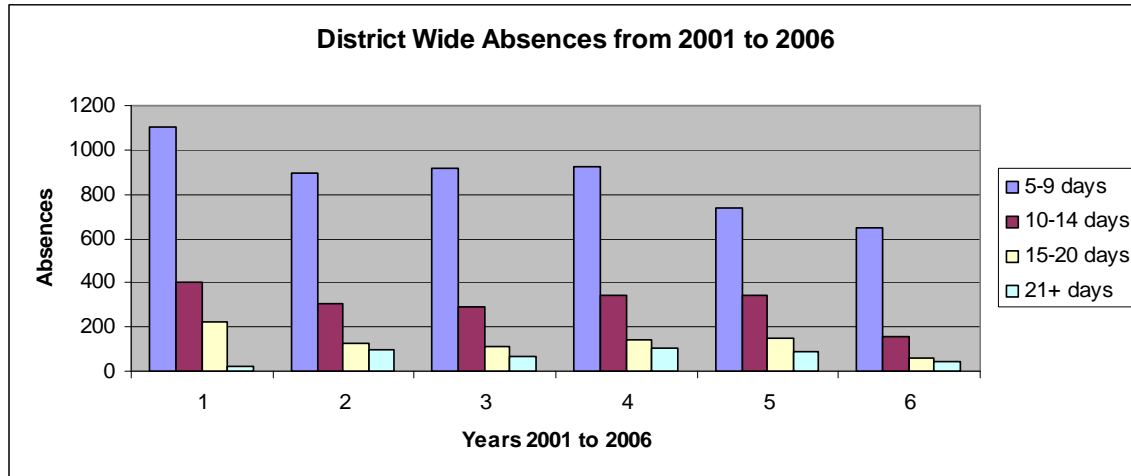
Chart 3

District wide absences likewise show a reduction across the years from 2001 to 2006. All of the categories show reductions, but proportionally, the reductions in the category of 21+ days are smaller than other reductions. This category of absence is the most difficult to reduce over time for two reasons: First, the numbers of students are small so a slight increase or decrease greatly affects the proportion. Second, the problems experienced by students who are absent in this category are most serious and least affected by school interventions.

2. *How did students in the district perform with respect to number of times tardy during the years 2005 through 2006?*

The number of times tardy is an indicator of student performance that is highly related to the pattern of absences indicated in the charts above. School profiles of reduction in the number of times tardy for each category are similar to the absence measure. Smith School apparently has the largest decrease in times tardy with Champlain a close second. Barnes has the least gain, but it also has about the lowest threshold of times tardy, suggesting that much of the work to reduce the tardy behavior at Wheeler and Barnes may have occurred in previous years.
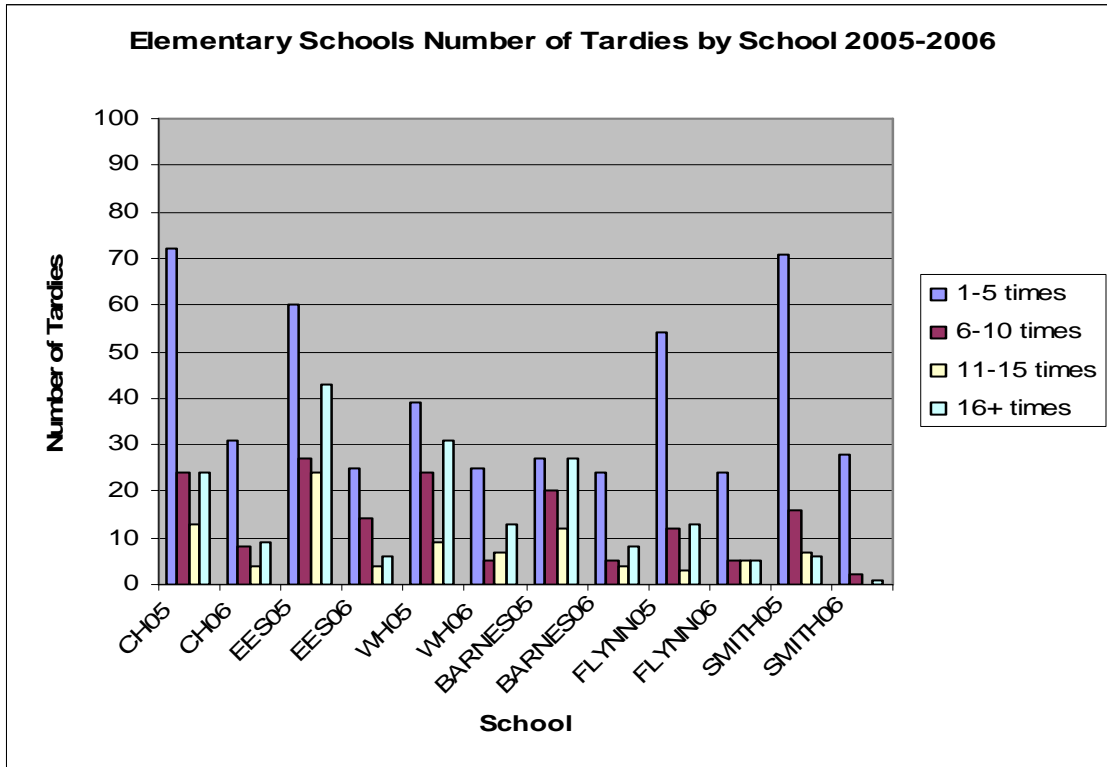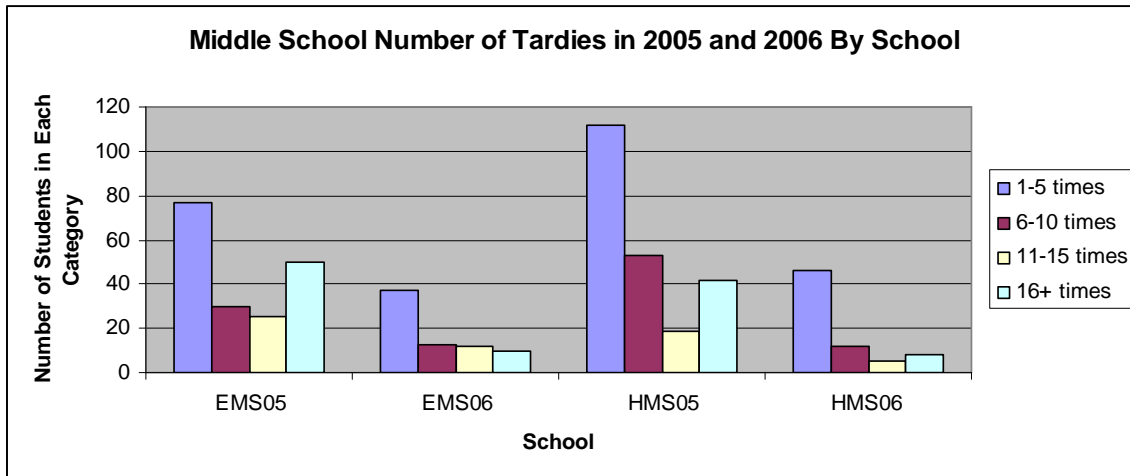
Chart 4

Elementary Schools Number of Tardies by School 2005-2006

Chart 5

Middle School Number of Tardies in 2005 and 2006 By School

Middle school reductions in the number of times tardy in both Edmunds and Hunt are impressive gains in all categories.

3. *How did groups of students (school populations) formed by gender perform with respect to absences in categories from 5 to more than 21 days?*

The proportions of males and females at each category of absence are among the most interesting of the findings for the study. A caveat to be observed in these results is noted: that some categories of absence represent very small numbers of students and sometimes only one or two students are represented in each category. In general, after controlling for the numbers of students in each category, the proportions are similar by gender, but males are slightly more likely to be absent for longer periods of time, placing them more at risk for dropping out later in school. Dropout statistics for Burlington High School were not available by gender.
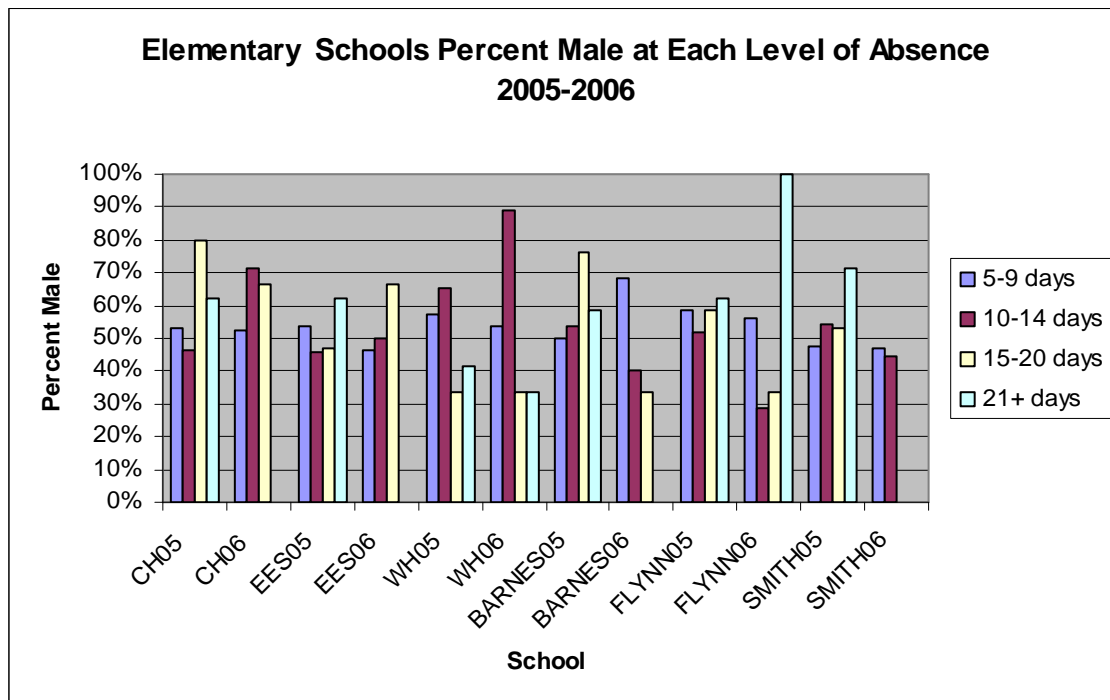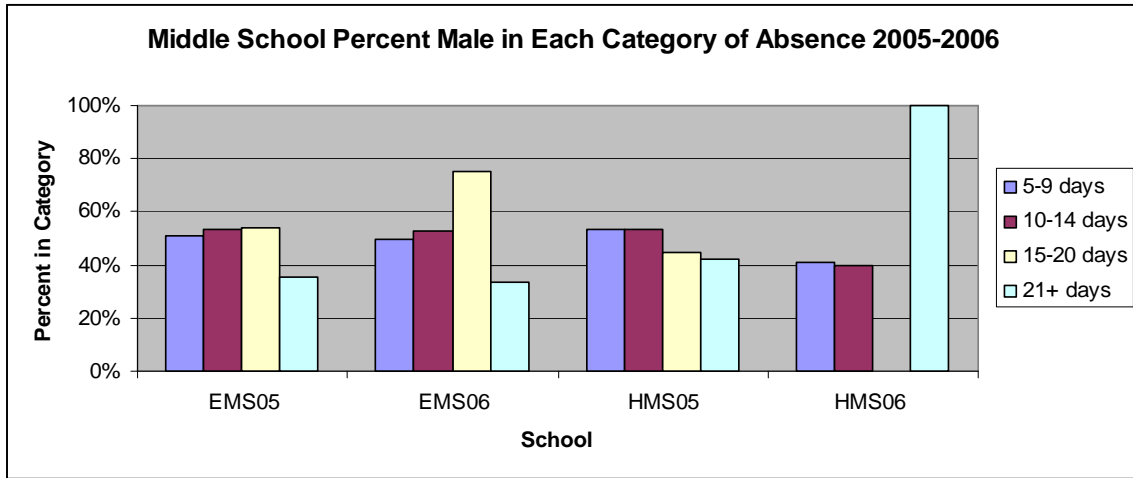
Chart 6

Chart 7

Middle School Percent Male in Each Category of Absence 2005-2006

Chart 8

Elementary Schools Percent Female at Each Level of Absence 2005-2006

Chart 9

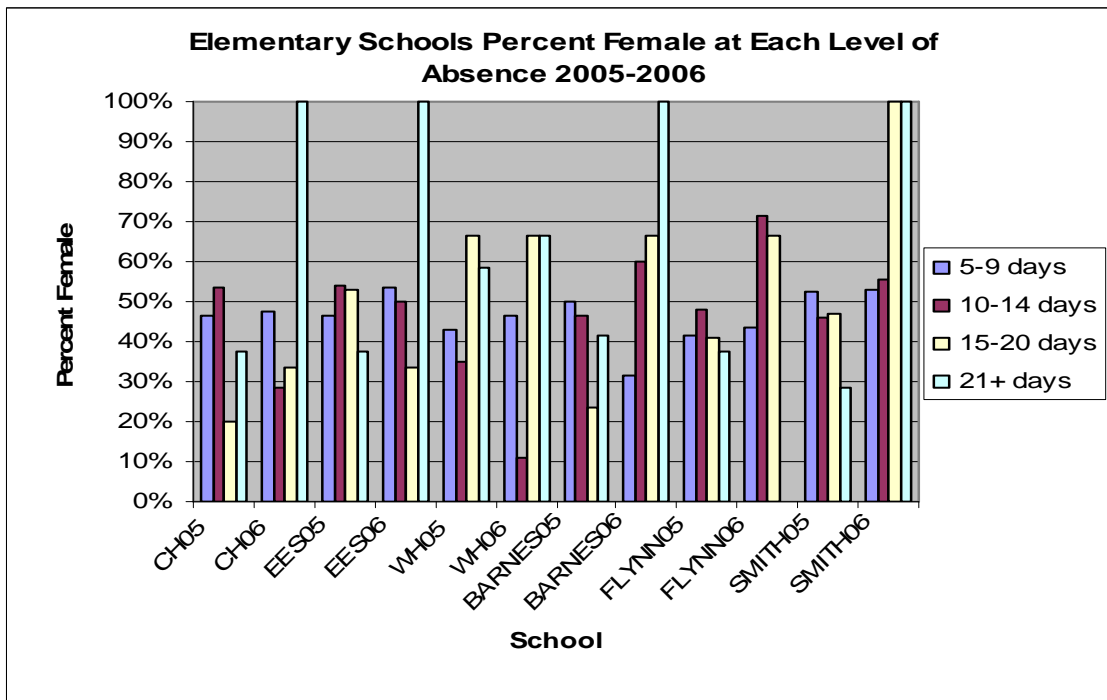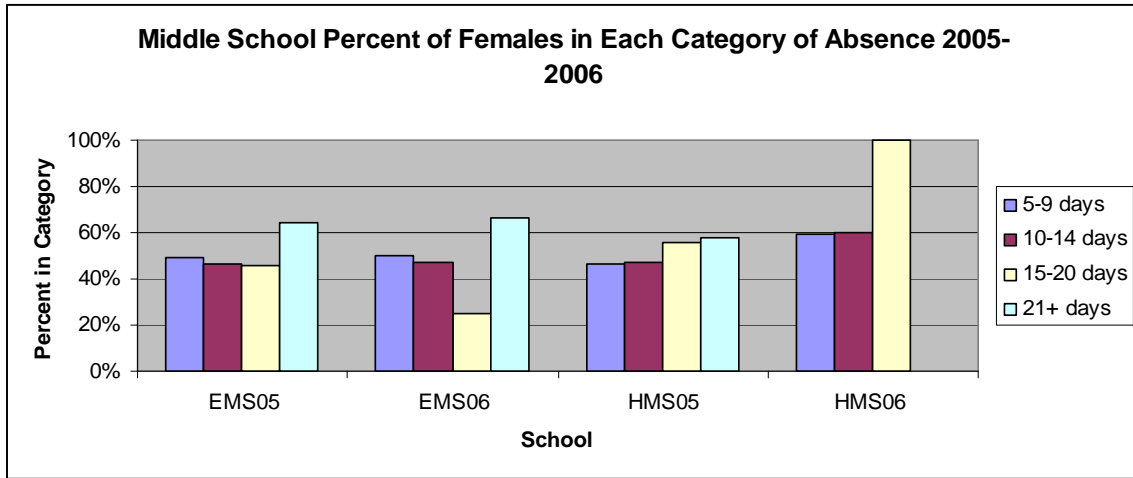**Middle School Percent of Females in Each Category of Absence 2005-2006**

4. *How did groups of students (school populations) who were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, compare with respect to the number of days absent by school in 2005 and 2006.*

The most striking aspect about these results is that, in general, students eligible for free or reduced lunch are the ones who account for most of the absences. However, this is somewhat a function of the proportion of students who are enrolled in each school and eligible for free or reduced lunch. For example, in Wheeler School, about 98 percent of enrolled students are eligible, while at the Flynn School, about 39% are eligible. At the same time, however, as the total number of absences in each school declines from 2005 to 2006, the proportion of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch increases from 2005 to 2006! This suggests that strategies to decrease absences may be working better for students who are not eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Chart 10
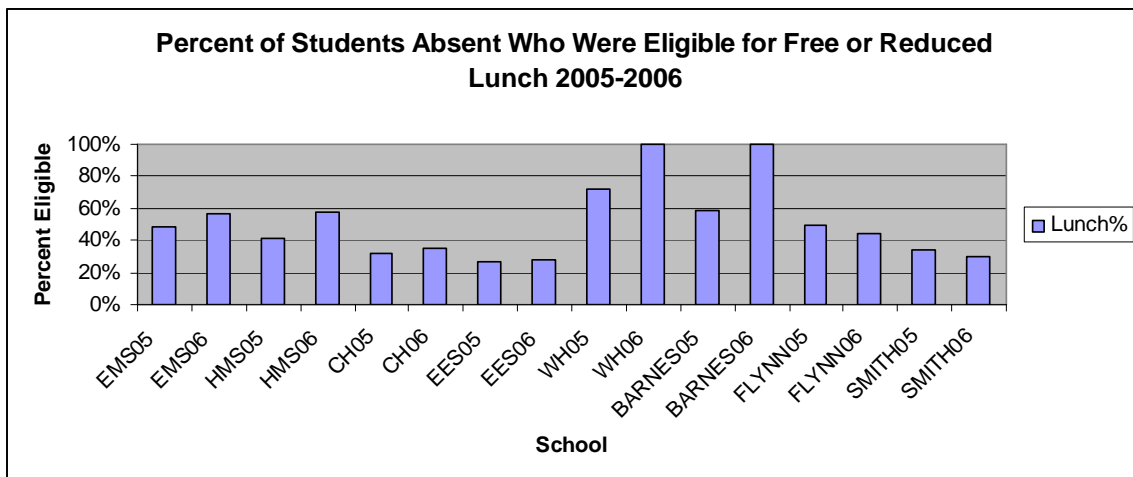
Percent of Students Absent Who Were Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch 2005-2006

5. *How did students in the district perform with respect to the dropout rate from 1999 through 2006?*

Perhaps the most noteworthy statistic of the evaluation is the reduction in dropouts from 1999 through 2006. The reduction can only be described as both significant and important. A reduction across time of 3 percentage points would normally be considered significant. More than 5 percent reduction is remarkable. While it is true that the metric has a large denominator because of its definition as an "event" rate, it is probable that the cohort dropout rate for this period, the reciprocal of the graduation rate, is likewise important. (See below)

**Chart 11**
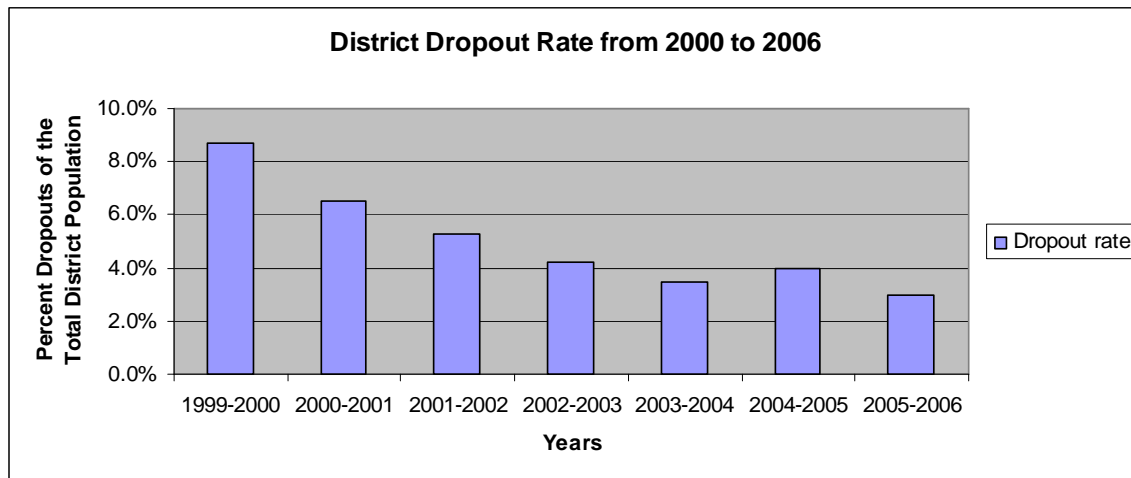
6. *How did students in the district perform with respect to the graduation rate from 2003 through 2006?*

The graduation rate from 2003 through 2006 has increased by about 12 percent. This means that the reciprocal of that number with respect to the proportion of the 9th grade class to drop out has also decreased by that amount. This reduction in cohort dropout rate is remarkable.
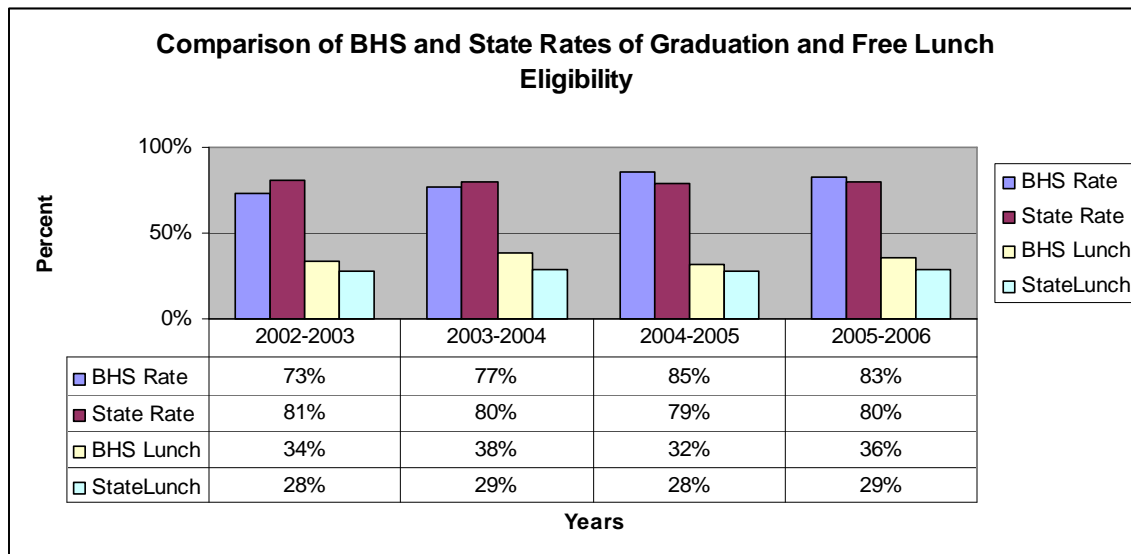
Chart 12
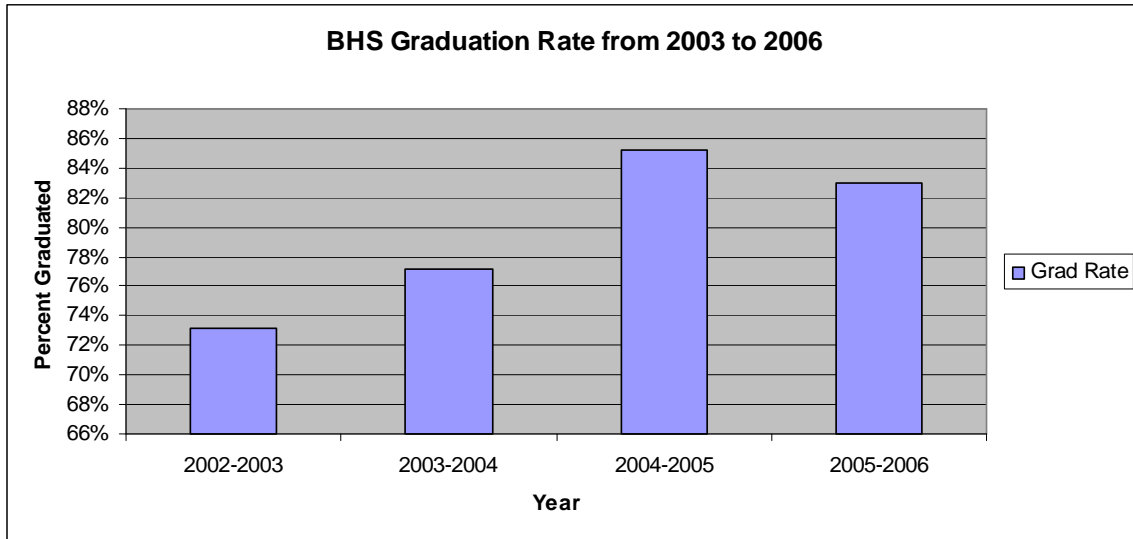
BHS Graduation Rate from 2003 to 2006

7. *How does the profile of graduation rates over the past four years compare with state averages, given the respective poverty rates for the state and district?*

This analysis is particularly noteworthy because it indicates that despite the district's higher rate of eligibility for free or reduced lunch, the graduation rate exceeds the state average. The state average for free or reduced lunch is 29%, while Burlington's average is 36%. So it is that a city graduation rate that exceeds the state average is statistically significant and important. Whether this increase is due to the success of the truancy prevention program is still a matter for further investigation with additional data; but, it is nevertheless a fact.

Chart 13

Comparison of BHS and State Rates of Graduation and Free Lunch Eligibility

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
BHS Rate	73%	77%	85%	83%
State Rate	81%	80%	79%	80%
BHS Lunch	34%	38%	32%	36%
StateLunch	28%	29%	28%	29%

DISCUSSION

*Recommendations for further study***:** The quantitative analyses of the data submitted for this evaluation are not sufficient to prove that the Truancy Prevention Program as implemented is responsible for the gains reported. However, it is the case that the district's profile of need associated with poverty has not changed over the span of years the program has been implemented, yet some key outcomes have been gained with respect to reductions in absences, tardies, dropouts and increases in graduation rates. The following recommendations for further study and investigation are drawn from these results:

- Data should be gathered and assembled that fills in the gaps of years since the program began until 2005 when data became available.

- Data should be assembled for all the years of the program's implementation that includes test scores, grades and enrollment in various leveled courses that indicate the depth and scope of opportunity to learn for each student. This would make it possible to control for variables of opportunity to learn that are not directly affected by the Truancy Prevention Program. Better outcomes for individual students could result from such analysis and subsequent adjustment of school programs.

- The finding that the proportion of free or reduced lunch absences actually increased from 2005 to 2006, while overall rates are decreasing, suggests that the program take a closer look at how to reduce **these** absences.

An interesting finding from the quantitative data is "that the threshold of 21+ days, which often signals the probability of dropping out between the 7th and 9th grade, disappears at both Edmunds Middle and Hunt Middle School between 2005 and 2006." In addition, "Middle school reductions in the number of times tardy in both Edmunds and Hunt are impressive gains in all categories." Could these findings be linked to the fact that these are the schools with attendance social workers? Are they an outcome of the project's preventive effects after several years of policy implementation that started at the elementary school level? It is difficult to do more than speculate on the answers to these questions, since the data do not track individual youth and their improvement.

Regarding qualitative findings, substantial input from students and families is missing from this report. A future study will hopefully be timed when the project staff members are in a position to assist with identifying and contacting students and families who would be willing to participate in the evaluation. Another study might also explore the effects of additional school supports, which were mentioned in the interviews, on the outcomes of the truancy prevention project.

CONCLUSION

Considerations for replication: Although the policy adopted by the Burlington schools is identified as their primary prevention approach, it is apparent that it works in tandem with relationships that give students both support and boundaries. For example, an important component of the policy includes the 15 day meeting for students and their families. While this is

a policy implementation, it is also a point at which supportive case management occurs, as a team of school and project personnel work with families to identify barriers to school attendance and plan how to overcome them. Community partners emphasize that accommodating needs and implementing as many supports as possible are important, coupled with being clear that a child must attend school.

The Project's support to families operates in a context of boundaries regarding school attendance. The ultimate goal is improved learning and prevention of problems that seem to be correlated with dropping out of school. It is also evident that court can at times include an important relational component that worked for at least one youth. In this case, the student sensed that one judge was genuinely interested in him. He also responded to another judge's directness about the consequences of truancy. As several staff members emphasized, the policy without support would not be effective and risks being seen as punitive by students and families. This is an important consideration for those interested in replicating Burlington's Truancy Prevention Project.

Sustainability: In the Burlington and Bennington districts, the schools have moved toward sustaining the truancy prevention efforts by taking over various degrees of funding for key positions. This has been both a positive outcome of each program's success, and remains a challenge to each district that wants to sustain the effort. Supportive relationship building by those skilled with youth and families that are experiencing multiple challenges requires compensation commensurate with skill level. Sustainability of these prevention efforts requires a financial commitment from the collaborating partners, including schools and other funding sources. Respondents emphasized the importance of investing in staff such as the attendance social workers.

Effects of community collaboration on project implementation: The interviews with school and program staff as well as community partners garnered important observations and perceptions of the Burlington Truancy Project. In addition to the fairness of the policy and the importance of supportive case management, often noted was the outstanding collaboration between the United Way and the Burlington Schools. The leaders of this partnership were able to bring community leaders and agencies together to maintain a focus on the problem and develop collaborative solutions and resources. In addition, the broad involvement of community partners including law enforcement, the courts, social workers, school-based health services, family service agencies and others, helped to ensure the policy was effectively implemented. Finally, the data based outcome measures, which were regularly collected and reported, resulted in frequent conservations across stakeholder groups to enhance the policy outcomes.

Appendix A
Interview Questionnaire for Project Personnel
Burlington Truancy Project

1. Tell us about your role in this project.

2. What are the challenges and opportunities you encountered in doing your work?

3. What are the best things that have come out of the project?

4. What do you think are the most essential parts of this project that make it work?

5. Are there students who did not benefit and if so, why?

6. What are things that you would like to do differently (or see done differently) in the future?

7. If another school district wanted to replicate this project, what would you recommend to them?

8. How do you see the future of this project? What components of the project will likely be sustained and how?

Appendix B
Interview Questionnaire for School Staff
Burlington Truancy Project

1. How and why was the Attendance Project developed, from your perspective?

2. Do you think this project has made a difference and if so, how?

3. What do you think are the most essential parts of this project that make it work?

4. What changes, if any, have you observed in the students who have been targeted by the project at your school?

5. Are there students who did not benefit from the project and if so, why?

6. What suggestions, if any, would you like to make to enhance the project?

7. If another school district wanted to replicate this project, what would you recommend to them?

8. How do you see the future of this project? What components of the project will likely be sustained and how?

Appendix C
Interview Questionnaire for Community Partners
Burlington Truancy Project

1. How did you get involved in this project?

2. What are your thoughts about the way the project has operated to achieve its goals?

3. What do you see as the outcomes?

4. What are the most important parts of the project that have contributed to these outcomes?

5. Do you have opinions about ways in which the project could be enhanced, and if so, what are they?

6. How have the various partners in this initiative collaborated to establish and maintain the project and its sustainability into the future?

7. If another community wanted to replicate the positive outcomes of this project, what would you recommend?

Appendix D
Interview Questionnaire for Students
Burlington Truancy Project

1. What has your experience with the Attendance Project at your school been like?

2. Has it made a difference in your experience of being in school and if so, how?

3. In what ways has the project helped you engage in school?

4. What do you think is the most important part of the Attendance Project that made it work for you?

5. Is there anything you would change about the Attendance Project and if so, what is it?

6. Do you think this project should be continued and if so, why?

Appendix E
Interview Questionnaire for Parents
Burlington Truancy Project

1. What were your experiences with the Attendance Project?

2. What was the best thing for your son or daughter that came out of the project?
   (Probe: What do you think made the difference?)

3. Did the Attendance Project help your son/daughter maintain an interest in school? If so, how?

4. If parents in another school district wanted to start a project like this, what advice would you
   give them?

5. Would you recommend that this project continue and if so, why?

6. Do you have any recommendations for how the program could be improved and if so, what
   are they?